

Leadership Excellence Award: After School Programming 2017

Gold prize Winner: Roy van Rooyen, Rietenbosch Primary School

Rietenbosch Primary School, located in Cloetesville, Stellenbosch, serves some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the district. However, Mr Roy van Rooyen, principal of this low-fee school, ensures that his learners enjoy many of the same opportunities offered to their wealthier peers. This he achieves through innovative partnerships with a variety of organisations.



Rietenbosch Primary is one of three primary schools in Cloetesville. The school was established in 1991 and Mr van Rooyen has been at the helm since 1999. During the past ten years, the number of learners at Rietenbosch Primary has increased from 420 in 2007, to 991 currently. This growth has enabled the hiring of additional teachers and staff.

Mr van Rooyen has adopted the motto “lead by example” as a personal standard and encourages his staff, teachers and partners to apply this maxim to their own lives. In so doing, he has earned the support of the school’s governing body, teachers, parents, learners and external stakeholders.

On Friday, 3 November, Mr van Rooyen added one more feather to his cap by clinching the Leadership Excellence Award: After School Programming for 2017.

This is a special ministerial award of the Western Cape Department of Education and the After School Game Changer. The Leadership Excellence Award seeks to recognise the school leaders, organisations and practitioners who work tirelessly to extend education for learners in the Western Cape.

A site visit and testimonies from various stakeholders showed that Rietenbosch has a diverse and consistent after school programme (ASP). The ASP is managed by the school working with partners to build a unique experience for learners at the school. Activities are run by both teachers and external partners. Mr van Rooyen is actively involved with the various programmes that make up the after school offering at Rietenbosch

Primary. He assists with the appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff – to positions where they can add the most value and which ultimately contribute to the success of the entire programme.

Principal van Rooyen believes that a successful after school programme benefits the school's current learners, positively impacts those from surrounding schools, and also acts as a means of attracting new learners to the school.

More than two-thirds of Rietenbosch learners participate in sports such as athletics, cricket, softball, badminton, hockey, rugby, netball, soccer, chess and even golf. These after school sporting activities are covered by school fees.

Partnerships with organisations such as the Jan Marais National Fund and CSV Construction have yielded a sand pit, sports fields and netball courts. The Stellenbosch Municipality helped to develop the wetlands around the school, while local farmers made machinery available to develop the sports fields. Other sport partners include the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (DCAS) and the Stellenbosch Academy of Sport.

Mr van Rooyen is an ardent campaigner for inclusivity in sport. Learners with physical disabilities are encouraged to participate in all sporting activities. For example, Paul Daniels, a grade 7 learner has had both of his legs amputated; he participates in athletics using sponsored blades. A former learner with autism was found to excel at chess. Several Rietenbosch learners are high achievers at sports such as athletics, rugby and chess, where they represent the school at district, regional and national level.



In addition to sport, after school offerings include those under the banner of arts and culture, life skills and academic support. Drama, dance and art classes are offered, but it is music that forms the largest part of the after school arts and cultural offering. Musical activities include traditional recorder and choir classes, as well as the more modern hip-hop, offered by the Department of Cultural Affairs, Neighbourhood School Programme. All learners are included in an annual concert and are encouraged to take part in external competitions and eisteddfods.

Life skills activities encompass those that are centred around the school and broader community, such as ecological awareness projects and excursions, and the popular Mr and Ms Rietenbosch competition. Academic support programmes include those aimed at learners – and at parents. Learners with academic problems are prioritised and there are classes aimed at improving reading, spelling, maths and studying skills.

Some of the more unusual offerings come from partnerships with Stellenbosch University. These include music jam sessions with grade 4-7 learners in which they learn to play an instrument and how to play in a group, while the Confucius Institute offers Mandarin classes. Acknowledging Mr van Rooyen's role in establishing Mandarin as an after school subject over the past six years, Confucius Institute Co-director Professor Jennifer Jian had this to say: "He collaborated with our institute actively in terms of disseminating Chinese culture and holding cultural activities. We really appreciate his support for the promotion and contribution of Chinese teaching."

It is clear that Stellenbosch staff and students benefit as much from the university's partnership with the school as Rietenbosch's learners do. According to Ms Michelle Pietersen, Senior Programme Manager: Matie Community Service, who has worked closely with Mr van Rooyen for the past five years, he demonstrates "great leadership qualities and commitment and drive to make a difference in the lives of learners at Rietenbosch Primary School. Mr van Rooyen has a sensitive and empathetic approach towards the learners, staff members and the students from Stellenbosch University." She added: "The invaluable contributions of Mr van Rooyen ensure the sustainability of student-driven programmes at Rietenbosch Primary School."

In addition to relationships with the university and corporates, Mr van Rooyen has fostered partnerships with a variety of non-profit organisations to enhance the after school programme. For example, ORT-SA provides Lego and robotics classes. Greenpop

and the Winelands Conservation Trust help to green the school, with 140 trees planted in 2016. Grade 6 learners are enrolled in the “tree-preneur” programme, sponsored by Qhubeka, Wildlands, Spier Wine Farm and the Pedal Power Association, whereby learners receive bicycles in their grade 7 year if they successfully cultivate saplings to specified growth requirements.

Learners with emotional problems receive professional support and counselling courtesy of Community Keepers, a non-profit organisation that also offers these services to teachers, non-teaching staff and parents to assist them with dealing with these challenges. There are special music classes for learners with symptoms of foetal alcohol syndrome, while parents too are assisted with reading classes. One mother of a disabled learner is employed by the school to be on hand should her child require her assistance.

Mr van Rooyen was nominated for the Leadership Excellence Award by the Chairperson of the Rietenbosch School Governing Body, Mr Patrick Kannemeyer. In his motivation as to why he believed that Mr van Rooyen deserved this honour, Mr Kannemeyer said that through his active

involvement with the after school programme, the principal remains abreast of its achievements – as well as the attendant challenges.

“By recognising learner achievements, as well as the contributions of partners, a positive attitude towards the ASP is maintained,”

“The socioeconomic circumstances of many of the school’s learners are of such a nature that the school has to be a home away from home. The learners need to feel safe and protected after school to enable them to take part in activities. Holiday programmes offer many of these learners a safe haven where they are offered physical activities and the necessary stimulation,” Mr Kannemeyer explained.

Parent evenings are held every quarter to encourage communication between the school and community. All role players are regularly invited to meetings and other special occasions, such as awards ceremonies. “By recognising learner achievements, as well as the contributions of partners, a positive attitude towards the ASP is maintained,” Mr van Rooyen said. He provides learners, teachers, parents and other partners the opportunity to develop their own voices “by creating room to listen to their choices and suggestions and to use these to improve the school environment.”

As winner of this year’s Leadership Excellence Award, Mr van Rooyen receives R20 000 – sponsored by The Learning Trust, an award partner committed to funding and advocating for the strengthening of the after school sector. Prize money may be used to support professional development, ICT integration, reading materials or facility resources to enhance the teaching and offering at Rietenbosch Primary School’s after school programme.

